

SEEING IS NOT BELIEVING

I want you to ask yourself for a moment, if you could have had a different career, just for one day, what would you pick? I can think of several ways I could have answered that question, but one career choice that comes to my mind is to be a special effects designer for the movies. I love movie special effects. In fact, there are some movies that I love as much for the special effects as for the plot. Frankly there are some that I love more for the special effects than the plot. I sometimes don't care if the story is any good at all, if the special effects are good.

These days, due to the magic of computers and computer-generated imagery, anything is possible. But I'm just as amazed by some of the special effects achieved in the era before computers were developed. For example, do you know how they created the tornado in the Wizard of Oz? Well, as it happens, I can tell you. That twister is actually a set of panty hose- that they filmed somehow specially to make it look like a tornado, and in my opinion, they did a pretty good job of making it look like a twister. Did you ever wonder how Cecil B. DeMille parted the Red Sea in The Ten Commandments?

I looked it up and it was a rather elaborate trick. The final results were rather impressive. It was, in fact, to date, the most expensive visual effect of all time. In an era before computer generated imagery, he convinced all of us that he had parted the Red Sea.

Of course, we all know it's just the magic of the movies that makes that happen. It's easy for us to suspend our disbelief, but we all know it isn't real. But the fact is that most of us think we will believe it when we see it. For us to accept something in real life, we have to have proof. We need to see it to believe it.

This need for proof is all pervasive. The first thing we want to know is that our information comes from a reliable source. I remember one time when the girls were small my family and I were talking about something - I don't remember what the topic was, and I said, "Well, let's look it up on Wikipedia." Rachel very quickly said, "Daddy, Wikipedia is not a reliable source." She must have been nine years old when she said that. Of course, I already knew this. I had been told that by a number of people including at UAH.

My degree from UAH is in mathematics. For the first year and a half, or so, we were learning application stuff. We used already proven laws of mathematics, but after that, most of what we were doing was using mathematics to prove things. We weren't allowed to take anything for granted. We often had to prove things that had already been proven in order to solve our problems correctly. In order to prove something in mathematics we have to prove that it is always true. If we can find even one example where it is false, however, we can conclude that it is false. It would appear that we are by nature a skeptical people.

So, one can hardly blame Thomas for doubting. The disciples had been following Jesus for three years. During that time, they had seen him do miracles. He had cast out demons and healed the blind, the lame and the leper. He had performed the miracle of feeding 5,000 people and had even raised Lazarus from the dead. He had bested the Pharisees in every attempt they had made to trap him. So, you might think they should believe him when he said he would be resurrected- but think for a moment.

But consider the events of the week prior to his death. They had seen Jesus rejected by the authorities, imprisoned, beaten, tortured, tried unjustly, and finally killed. Having fed 5,000 people, it appeared he couldn't even save himself. Who could blame the Disciples for being scared? Who could blame the disciples for going to ground? They were hiding in their house for fear of the authorities, and who could blame them? Can any of us truly say that we would have done better?

Then Jesus appears to them on the evening of the first day of the week. Jesus gives them his typical greeting, "Peace be with you." Then he showed them his hands and side. The disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus again said, "Peace be with you." Then he added, "As the father has sent me, so I send you." Then he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit."

But the Scripture says Thomas wasn't with them when Jesus came. The disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe." Thomas doesn't even trust his fellow Disciples.

And you know what? I don't blame him. After all, we're asking him to accept a lot on faith. We're asking him to set aside his fear. We're asking him to set aside what his senses are telling him. We're asking him to take the word of his fellow Disciples and to accept the prophecies of a dead man. I would find that hard to do, too.

Scripture goes on to record that a week later his disciples were again in the house. This time Thomas is with them. Jesus came in even though the doors were shut. The formula of the last encounter is repeated. He says, "Peace be with you." Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe." Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe."

Now look at the world in which we live. I have to say that some people in the world in which we live will believe anything, but some people live in a world that requires proof. They live in a world where seeing is believing. They have to be able to prove it. What proof can we offer them that Christ has been raised from the dead other than our testimony? Show us a formula, show us a documented example with

reliable witnesses present that Jesus was raised from the dead. Besides all these things happened two thousand years ago. How can you be sure that it really happened?

I have to say that for me, there is some hypocrisy behind this question. Scientists have shown that they, too, are willing to believe in things that they can't see. For example, as early as the 1960's scientists believed in a substance known as dark matter. However, it was only in 2009 that scientists were actually able to find a dark matter particle. Before that it was all theoretical, and yet they believed in it because the math seemed to suggest it was there. I expect that there are other things in Physics that are like that.

I think there's an important point to be raised here. Belief isn't really about seeing. It isn't about what we can see. If it were, we would never be able to believe in anything, because our eyes constantly fool us. They fool us every time we watch a magic show, because the magician knows how to manipulate our perception. Believing is about aligning thoughts and feelings to our true selves. Jesus alludes to this when he says, blessed are those who have not seen and yet believed.

You see these are people who wanted to believe that Jesus had never left. Why? Because the things that he preached: love, grace, forgiveness, peace- these were the qualities that made for a world that they wanted. Isn't that what we all want. They didn't need to see his wounds to believe. They believed because of who they were. Their very lives were a testimony to the risen Jesus.

Which leaves us with a question. I want to read to you another passage in scripture- one that I didn't mark down in the bulletin. This is from Galatians 5. Paul says, "Now, the works of the flesh are obvious." He goes on to list several things, but there's a few things I want to lift out of the list. "Enmities, strife, jealousy, anger, quarrels, dissensions, factions, envy..." Now, those are included in the list of the works of the flesh. He goes on a little later to say, "By contrast the fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Those are the fruits of the spirit."

Are our lives a testimony to the works of the flesh are they a testimony to the fruit of the spirit? Do we need to see to believe? If others need to see to believe, what are we showing them? Can we be his disciples, even in a world that has rejected him? Did we come here to hide for fear of what everyone else thinks? Or do we believe regardless of what everyone else thinks? Do we need to see to believe? If so, how can we really say we believe?

I think these questions are critical for us today in the wake of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. They don't really tell us that much about Christ, but they tell us volumes about who we are- *WHO WE ARE*. Christ loves us; Christ forgives us; everything that was on that list of the fruits of the spirit were qualities that Christ had: love, peace, forbearance, kindness, gentleness, self-control. Christ is

prepared to save us regardless of what we think. Christ is real and wants only to save. The question is do we believe that enough, that we are willing to live our lives as disciples. Are we believers enough to manifest the fruits of the spirit in our own lives, or is our faith so weak that we need to see?